

# Ethics of Life

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, folks, good to see so many of you here. My name's Tom Schmidt. Welcome to Trinity Baptist Church's Adult Sunday School. We are in the midst of a series talking about Christianity and life, if I'm not mistaken, also after that.

Why don't we open in prayer, and then we'll begin. Father in heaven, we thank you for this opportunity to come together, to hear from your word, to hear from your wisdom. Lord, we know that you commanded us, thou shalt not murder. And Lord, we hold that command dearly, and we ask that you would give us wisdom about what that means. In all circumstances and in all ways, in extreme circumstances and in everyday circumstances.

We pray that you would illuminate us, give us understanding, and that you would guide us in our time this hour together. And we pray this in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen. So, like I said, today we'll be talking about capital punishment. Capital punishment, it's the technical term for the death penalty. This is when someone who's convicted of, in this day and age, a terrible crime, is actually put to death legally by the state.

[ 1 : 33 ] Most countries have abolished this practice. The United States remains, though, a minority who still holds to the practice of capital punishment. This used to be the norm.

You know, you go back even 100 years ago, 200 years ago, and capital punishment was all over the place. And sometimes people were executed for what we would consider extremely minor crimes. But that's not really the case today, especially in the United States.

But still, I just wanted to give you some statistics. I found in my quick internet research that since the 1970s, in the United States, 1,641 men and women have been executed in the United States. Typically, it's a little bit less than 30 people a year. Last year, it was about one every other week is being executed in the United States.

But this varies by state. Connecticut does not have the death penalty. There's some states that do have it but effectively don't use it. And then there are a few states that use it quite a bit.

[ 2 : 38 ] So most of these are coming from a handful of states. This brings up a question, though, that I know you're all thinking about is, what should Christians do regarding the death penalty and capital punishment?

What is our role? What does the Bible have to say about it? Is this something that is permissible but should be avoided at all costs?

Or is it something that's inherently immoral and wicked no matter the circumstance? Or is this just retribution for a heinous crime?

Related questions. Does it deter future crime? Does it give respite and relief to the victims? Or is this something that just glorifies violence, is always sinful, is just begetting wrong?

Is this something that was maybe allowed under the Old Covenant in the Old Testament? But in the New Covenant, in the New Testament, should always be held as immoral.

[ 3 : 43 ] This morning, I'm going to try to chart out as well as I can two different perspectives on capital punishment, on the death penalty. So we'll be doing sort of like a dialectic point-counterpoint kind of thing.

This is in part because, this is a very hard question, Christians have traditionally, there's two main camps. And these camps, and I don't want to say pro-death penalty because that means like people are rooting for it.

I guess what I mean is like it's permissible versus it's never permissible. And these two camps go way back in the church. Even to very, very early church times, there's been these two different ideas.

So I'm going to try to present these two sides as well as I can for you. And we're going to first look at biblical passages and what the Bible has to say.

Then we'll consider some philosophical and theoretical objections to both sides. Some things that people often bring up.

[ 4 : 51 ] And then we will try and draw some lessons that we all can take, regardless of where we happen to fall. Some lessons that we can draw from this debate over capital punishment and the value of a human life.

Sound good? Okay. Let's get started. The first time God directly addresses, I guess I could say the second time.

We'll get to that first passage in a little bit. But the first time that God directly addresses something that might be explicitly related to capital punishment is in Genesis 9, 6.

And this is after the flood of Noah. Noah and God is giving Noah and his family permission to eat from the fruit of the earth and also from wild animals.

And God says this, Whoever sheds the blood of man by man shall his blood be shed. For God made man in his own image.

[ 6 : 01 ] This feels like a very broad statement about the value of human life.

That if someone were to kill another person, that person is made in God's image. And that the person who committed that crime should also have their blood shed.

At least that's how some people interpret the passage. So for those who are on the sort of capital punishment is permissible, they go to this verse as a foundational verse.

Because it's before the Mosaic Law. Some people hold those kinds of commands in even higher esteem. It's pre-Old Covenant. And it seems to be sanctioning the taking of someone's life if they have taken another person's life unjustly.

There is, though, some pushback to this. If you are familiar with Old Testament commands like this and discussions like this, this also could just simply be read as a proverbial saying.

[ 7 : 06 ] That, yeah, I mean, if you go around killing people, you're probably going to get killed.

That's how other people interpret this. That this is what goes around comes around. And there are biblical cases where there are statements like this that should be interpreted in a proverbial sense.

But there are some other passages that also help contextualize this. One is controversial in its own, in a different way, which I'll talk about in a moment.

But some people point to John chapter 8. This is a famous story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery.

And I just want to read it. I'm sure you're familiar with it. But I want to read this because it's so powerful. This is in John chapter 8. Early in the morning, Jesus came again to the temple and all the people came to him.

And he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery. And placing her in the midst, they said to him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery.

[ 8 : 11 ] Now, in the law of Moses, he commanded us to stone such a woman. What do you say? This they said to test Jesus that they might have some ground to bring against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her. And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones. And Jesus was left alone with a woman. And Jesus stood up and said to her, Woman, where are they?

Has no one condemned you? And she said, No one, Lord. And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, sin no more.

Here we have a woman who is charged with a capital crime. And Jesus seems to forgive her. And he's even put on the spot where they're trying to get him to condemn her to death.

[ 9 : 14 ] And he refuses. He doesn't say that what she did was okay. He says, Go and sin no more. He clearly thinks that adultery is wrong.

So some people go to this verse to show that Jesus did not approve of the death penalty. As I said, we're going to be going point, counterpoint, point, counterpoint throughout this class.

So there is some responses to this. One is that this, of course, does not have to do with murder, like Genesis 9-6 spoke of. It has to do with adultery.

And then secondly, there is also that question, as some of you might know, of whether this story should be in the New Testament. Usually in our Bibles, it's bracketed because some manuscripts omit it.

We can talk more about that if you're interested. I think the best way to interpret this story is that there is some evidence that Jesus actually did do something very much like this.

[10:19] And regardless if it was in the Gospel of John or not, it's something Jesus actually did. So we still can learn from this. We could talk more about that.

But there's a second counterpoint to this Genesis 9-6 passage. And that is even earlier in Genesis. This is in Genesis chapter 4 with Cain and Abel. And that terrible story. Cain and Abel, they're the children of Adam and Eve.

And Cain is jealous of Abel and he kills him. Matt. I just wanted to say another counterpoint on the woman taken in adultery.

Is that just like Jesus said on another occasion, who made me judge over you with regard to inheritance? That Jesus was not in a judicial position.

[11:21] And that often people were trying to push him. That's good. Yes. In a way that he was told to do. That's a good point.

We're going to touch on that later on. That idea that some people will bring up is that there's a big difference between your role as a regular Christian in the world compared to if you're appointed in a political office.

And Matt, you're getting at that. That Jesus could have one interpretation of John 8 is that Jesus was not in a position of political power.

And so he was like, I don't have authority over this matter. Okay. So a counterpoint to Genesis 9-6 is that Cain murders his brother Abel unjustly.

And God, of course, knows about this. And in Genesis 4, verse 9, the Lord says to Cain, Where is Abel your brother?

[12:24] And Cain said, I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper? And the Lord said, What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.

So we have that blood was shed. Genesis 9-6 says the blood of Cain should be shed. What does God do?

Well, he says, Cursed are you from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.

And Cain said to the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. You've driven me today away from the ground. And from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. And whoever finds me will kill me.

And then the Lord says, Not so. If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

[13:27] And Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. God doesn't kill Cain. He has mercy on him.

And Cain is actually worried other people will kill him. And God says, No, no, that's not going to happen. I'm going to put this mark on you. Sometimes we hear that term mark of Cain. It's used in a very negative sense.

But it looks like it's a protective mark on Cain. At least that's one way to interpret it. So I hope you see the counterpoint going on here.

Is that an example of murder, the first murder that's quite near the passage in Genesis, the actual execution is not carried out. We've got more verses to go through, folks.

Another one is Exodus chapter 21. This is in the Mosaic law, when Moses is giving commandments to the Israelites.

[14:32] Exodus 21 verses 14 through 24. The law, the Mosaic law says, If a man willfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar that he may die.

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. That phrase, you shall take him from my altar, what that meant is that in the ancient world, people, altars, holy places, sanctuaries were viewed as areas where you could go and receive reprieve, where if you were convicted of a crime or if someone was hunting you, you could go into this sanctuary and stay there, and people couldn't harm you.

And people apparently would try to do this in God's temple. And what God says here is that if someone willfully attacks another person to kill that person by cunning, then you are even allowed to drag him away from my altar in order to put him to death.

That's what the purport of the law seems to be. And then it emphasizes several verses later that the standard of God's justice is this eye for eye, tooth for tooth kind of manner, that the punishment should fit the crime, so to speak.

If you murder someone, you should have your life taken. Well, that does seem very clear about how capital punishment is permissible.

[16:06] But then we come to Jesus again. Jesus shows up again. This is the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5. If you have never read the Sermon on the Mount with an eye towards the Ten Commandments or to the Book of the Law, please do so because you'll see Jesus constantly hearkening back to the Ten Commandments and other policies in the Mosaic Law.

And he sort of expands upon these principles. And in the Sermon on the Mount, he said this, you have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

He's quoting from that passage we just read. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

Those who oppose the death penalty point to this verse as answering this one. And they will often argue that this was part of the Old Covenant.

[17:17] It is not part of the New Covenant. That Christians are called to surpass those things. And in fact, if we keep reading what Jesus has to say, he says, you've heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?

Do not even the tax collectors do the same? Now, Jesus was not talking about eye for eye or tooth for tooth here, but we could apply that same logic and say, doesn't the nations run after the death penalty?

Shouldn't Christians be beyond that? Shouldn't we love people more than that and not put people to death because they're in God's image, because we recognize that? We're going to continue with our point and counterpoint here.

Thus far, we've been talking about some Old Testament passages that appear, at least from some perspectives, to support capital punishment, to support the death penalty.

[18:27] And we've been looking at two New Testament passages from Jesus that have some pushback to that and then another Old Testament passage that provides some pushback to this. Now we're going to switch things and we're going to look at a New Testament passage that seems to support capital punishment and then we'll look at an Old Testament passage that seems to not.

So we'll start in Romans 13. This is Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 13. This is such a wonderful epistle of Paul and in chapter 13, he starts dispensing some moral advice.

The whole letter up to this point is theological. It's sort of this systematic theology of explaining our salvation in Christ. But towards the end, Paul starts giving some practical exhortations.

And he says this, he says, let every person be subject to the governing authorities for there is no authority except from God and those that exist have been instituted by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed and those who resist will incur judgment. If I pause here for a moment before continuing, this is an important theological claim, especially when Christians are considering what the role of the government is in our lives.

[19:51] And Paul says that in some way, human governing authorities have been appointed by God and we are to submit to them and not resist them.

Now, this brings up all sorts of other questions about unjust government that we're not talking about in this class, but let's continue. Paul explains, for rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good. And you will receive his approval. For he, the governing authority, is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid. For he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger, who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

Therefore, one, the Christian, must be in subjection to the government, not only to avoid God's wrath, but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this, you also pay taxes.

[ 20 : 51 ] For the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. And he concludes, pay to all what is owed to them, taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

This passage brings up a lot of questions about how we are to engage with the government. What do we do with an unjust government? What do we do when we're in a democracy where we somehow elect our officials?

How does this all relate? These are great questions, but they're beyond the scope of our class today. We are focusing just on capital punishment. And this comes up in verse four, where Paul says, the governing authority is God's servant for your good, but if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain.

That phrase, bearing the sword in vain, is old time talk for the death penalty. That's what the Romans did. And believe me, if you know ancient history, the Romans loved killing people. They killed a lot of people. They did it for fun. They literally did it for fun in the gladiatorial contests. You could be executed for quite a bit of, a lot of things. And Paul says, they don't bear the sword in vain.

[ 22 : 04 ] People point to this passage. Those who argue in favor of the death penalty point to this passage that Paul here is sanctioning the use of capital punishment, but only from the civil authorities, not from the church, not from personal vendettas, not from a Christian perspective in the sense of you acting in the name of Christ, but only if you are appointed into some kind of governing role that gives you that sort of permission.

This gets at Matt's comment earlier, where there's some perspectives on Jesus, is that Jesus was not in that civil authority, and that's why he eschewed, he eschewed the death penalty.

Well, interesting argument. make some good points, but let's go to another passage. This time in the Old Testament.

This is Isaiah chapter 2, and this is a prophecy about what is to come in the latter days. Isaiah says, It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the hills, and shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

[ 23 : 52 ] And nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. This is this beautiful prophecy of the end times when Christ returns, some people also interpret this as the age of the church when all people are streaming towards the God of Israel like we see today.

And it's a beautiful passage, and what is the marker of this end time is when the law of the Lord goes forth and what happens? People beat their swords into plowshares.

They take their weapons and they turn them into implements for harvest and for getting fruit from the land. Plowshares, of course, are those pieces of metal and plows that furrow the land so you can plant crops and grow and feed people.

And people point to this saying, okay, what we should be aiming for is not living in this fallen world. We should be aiming for this kind of world that Isaiah is talking about.

And that's what Christians should be living for and living in because we live in this sort of here but not yet stage of life where we should be trying to bring the kingdom of God on earth and a marker of that is beating our swords into plowshares.

[ 25 : 14 ] So we should not be party to bearing the sword in vengeance against people even if we are part of the civil authorities is how the argument goes.

Okay. Before I turn to some thoughts, philosophical reflections and theological reflections on these sort of points and counterpoints, let me pause and just see if there's any questions before we turn the page and go.

Richard. So in a general way, a more general way, I think the saying of Jesus, the one saying apparently that the liberals think is authentic give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God has a bearing on this subject too.

Though Jesus is not talking about the death penalty, he's talking about the next thing worse to death and that's taxes. Yeah, so Jesus has that famous passage where he's asked if we should pay taxes to Caesar and they're trying to catch him in this because they know that if he says no, they can charge him with insurrection against the Romans.

If he says yes, then they can go to all the other common folks and say, look how much he hates you, he wants you to pay these taxes. Aren't they, isn't he terrible? So it's a lose-lose situation. Jesus, classic Jesus, comes up with his genius response where he has them get a coin that shows Caesar's face and he says, whose face is this?

[ 26 : 59 ] Well, then give to Caesar what is Caesar's and give to God what is God's. But the principle behind that could, could be used to say, yeah, the civil authorities are in charge of life and death and Jesus is giving them that authority.

You could make that argument. I'm sure people have. This is why this is such a thorny, such a thorny question. Well, let's look at a few things here.

One is, I want us to remember that there is a difference between thinking that something is illegal and immoral.

immoral. So, it is possible for Christians to hold a position where they think that something that is immoral should be, in some circumstances, not illegal.

That's one thing to consider. So, for instance, lying, Christians' view is wrong, but, you know, do you think the government should pass a law saying you can never lie to a family member or you go to jail, that would, most Christians would be like, I don't know if that should be part of the civil law.

[ 28 : 19 ] You can't lie to the government, though. it's true. It's true. So, there is a difference between something being illegal and something being immoral.

Those don't necessarily, they're not necessarily inherently linked. Obviously, there is a connection between those, but it's not inherent that one follows the other.

Another thing to remember is that there is a difference between the church and the state. So, just because you think the state should be able to do something doesn't mean you think the church should be able to do something and vice versa.

So, there are people that, and this is fortunately very common, where very few people think the church should put people to death and there are people who think the state should be allowed to, but there's many instances like this where people think something is not the state's business but it's the church's business and vice versa.

So, that's another thing to keep in mind. There's a difference between church and state, there's a difference between illegal and immoral. Another, another thing to keep in mind is that there's a difference between something that is technically permissible and something that you think should, should just never happen in our day and age.

[ 29 : 46 ] change. So, let me give you an example. It is not contradictory to argue that, yes, in theory, the death penalty can, there are circumstances where the death penalty could be permissible, but in practice, it should be illegal in the United States or in whatever country you have.

death penalty is not a contradictory position. You can hold that position where you can think, yes, it's not that it's always in every single circumstance impermissible or immoral, but I just think it should be illegal in our country.

So, this is sort of the reverse of the first thing I said, that something might be permissible morally, but you just think it should be illegal. So, you might think that, yes, the death penalty is not inherently wrong in all circumstances.

I can imagine some extreme circumstances where it would be okay, but I still think it should be illegal in this country. That's, that's another valid position. Are you following me here?

Okay. So, those are some things to keep in mind. What I want to do now, though, is go through issues that people have with capital punishment, objections that they've brought up, and then I want to go through issues that people have with not having capital punishment, and issues they have brought up, and then we'll conclude with some lessons for us as followers of Jesus.

[ 31 : 14 ] So, problems with capital punishment. These are frequent arguments that people make who want to abolish the death penalty. One is that it is not an effective deterrent, that many arguments in favor of the death penalty argue that it deters crime, that it frightens criminals, and there is evidence that it doesn't, and that it has no deterring effect, that when people commit crimes, they're not thinking clearly, when they are thinking clearly, they're so beyond the pale that they don't care, they're so arrogant they think they'll never be caught, and that it's not an effective deterrent.

That's one argument against it. Another is inconsistent application. If you go and you look at death penalty cases, you'll probably be horrified at sometimes when person A gets sentenced to death for some crime, like they're part of a bank robbery that goes bad and their partner kills someone, but then they get sentenced to death because they were considered part of this murder, versus someone who does something so much worse and gets 20 years in prison.

And this feels unjust. It feels that it is not, the weight of this is inconsistent and that in order for something to be just, we have to have consistency.

So a second argument is inconsistent application. A third argument is racism. That the United States has a history of racism and of racist application of laws and you can look at the death penalty and make arguments that this is still affecting our sentencing of criminals, that white people get off more frequently than someone convicted of a similar crime who's of a different ethnic group, especially African Americans.

So we've got not effective deterrent, inconsistent application. We have the racist implications, especially in our country, there's more though.

[ 33 : 18 ] One is financial cost. It costs a huge amount of money to put someone to death and it's cheaper to give them life in prison and that saved money can go to preventing further crime or rehabilitating criminals or to the families of victims.

That's another argument. Yet another one, that the death penalty inherently glorifies violence. violence. If you have a violence problem in your society, this argument would say the wrong solution is more violence.

The better solution is to end violence, to stop doing that. Notice that this argument is beyond circumstances.

This kind of argument applies sort of everywhere in every context. Here's another one, wrong convictions. You can't undo a death penalty. Once it's carried out, it's over.

And this means that if someone is wrongfully convicted, there is no possible, and then that sentence is carried out, there is no possible retribution or restitution that can be given to that person who suffered that wrong conviction.

[ 34 : 35 ] Typically, people who are wrongfully convicted are the most vulnerable, they're disabled, or they don't have financial means to defend their crime. So they're the ones that are the most at risk of this kind of wrong done to them.

And there are cases of this. I'm an ancient historian, so there's a terrible story that Constantine, the first Christian emperor, his son betrayed him and did something horrible, and so Constantine had his own son executed and then found out later that his son was innocent.

Horrible, horrible thing. And that has happened in modern times. Okay, another argument. The death penalty does not allow for the chance of repentance.

It cuts short the ability for the criminal to repent of their wrong. And, of course, in the United States, typically, it takes decades, certainly years, but even more than a decade for a death sentence to be carried out.

But in other countries, like in China, it's very quick. And this does not allow for repentance. final argument, final argument, there's a lack of a chance for reconciliation.

[ 36 : 01 ] You're cutting short the ability for this person to repent of their crime and to be reconciled with the families of the victim. And there are stories of the opposite happening.

For instance, that serial killer, son of Sam, he was like New York City or New Jersey serial killer, he's in prison for life, he's been in prison for quite some time, apparently has become a Christian. I don't, you know, we can't see people's hearts, but he apparently has become a Christian and has been reconciled with one of the mothers of his victims, in large part due to his conversion and his repentance.

And that's a beautiful thing. I mean, if that is true, the angels are singing in heaven over that. But if he had been executed right after he was convicted, that never would have happened.

And it would have been gone. So those are arguments against capital punishment that you get in both Christian and non-Christian perspectives. Some of those are very common to Christians like the lack of repentance, but some of these are consistent from even non-Christian perspectives.

[ 37 : 15 ] Okay, let's move to problems with not having the capital punishment or arguments against abolishing the capital punishment or arguments in favor of the death penalty. So one argument is that many of the above issues like cost, inconsistency, being ineffective, it being applied in a racist manner, these are fixable problems.

These are not inherent problems. They're fixable. We should identify these problems and strive to fix them. And once we have then they're no longer issues. Another argument regarding the lack of a chance for repentance is that perhaps it encourages repentance.

There's nothing like facing your last hour to encourage repentance. And if any of you have ever been in a situation where you fear for your imminent death, you will understand this, where there is very little greater motivation that you're about to meet your maker than to know you are about to meet your maker and to try and repent from your sins.

So that's one argument. Here's another argument. And this is an argument in favor of the victims. This argument goes that this is the most merciful tactic for the victims, for the family members who suffered at the hands of a terrible criminal.

that even in life sentences, victims often live in constant fear of this perpetrator escaping. And victims often have to attend grueling parole hearings.

[ 39 : 00 ] Every five years they have to show up and they have to make this plea why this person shouldn't be released. They often anticipate this with much trepidation for months beforehand.

And there are cases where people have been sentenced to life in prison without parole. So they're in some maximum security place where there's no chance of escape and there's no chance of parole.

people. But it has happened in the past where states say life without parole is unjust, it's cruel and unusual and they retroactively allow for the chance of parole and then someone gets out only to commit the same murders again.

And that has happened. So the argument against that is that life in prison is not actually life in prison because we have these examples of people getting out or people continuing to commit their crimes in the prison against officers or guards or other prisoners.

So here's a final point. And this isn't so much in favor of the death penalty at all times in all civilizations.

[ 40 : 14 ] It's just a point about it. And it sort of pushes us to consider extreme circumstances. And what we think of extreme circumstances, it turns out, might actually be normal circumstances for most people.

Not for us, but for most people throughout history. So if we look at the human condition throughout history, it turns out that most humans, for most of human history, cannot afford or even have the ability to have prisons.

For instance, if you can't make metal, it's very hard to have a prison. And if you live in a remote village or you're a hunter-gatherer group of a couple hundred people, what do you do when someone commits a horrible, horrible, horrible crime?

You have no ability to incarcerate them. If you have no ability to maintain some kind of exile policy, they can just walk back. And if they've repeatedly committed horrific things, these poor people don't really have many options.

They can't imprison someone, they can't afford guards, they're living their subsistence. And so the argument goes, if someone keeps murdering someone, then they should be put to death.

[ 41 : 36 ] There's no other choice. You can't exile them, you can't imprison them, you can't do these things. And actually, this is perhaps one of the motivators behind some of the Exodus laws because we are dealing with a society that, when the Mosaic law was given, that is kind of like one of those societies.

They're not quite that extreme. They could temporarily imprison people temporarily. They did have access to metal to make chains and bars and stuff, but this is extremely expensive.

Clearly, they couldn't do it for very long or for very many people. On the other hand, though, this argument can be turned because the argument could say, yes, okay, in those situations, capital punishment might be appropriate, but that's not what the world we live in today.

And that might explain some of these rules, like in Exodus or even in Romans. Remember that even in the time of the Roman Empire, prisons did not exist.

They had jails. They had temporary holding cells, but they didn't really have prisons like we have today. They couldn't afford to take thousands of people and just guard them.

[ 43 : 01 ] them. So that's why they had slavery, because they would make them slaves. That's why they made them work in the mines. They put them on ships. They would exile them to islands because our ability to imprison people is something that really only modern civilizations have been able to develop.

And those options were not long-term viable options in the past. Okay, let's conclude with some lessons we can draw from this.

Number one, the Bible is clear that the crime of murder is worthy of death. It is worthy of death. However, so are all sins.

So are all sins in God's eyes. Here's another lesson. It is right. It is right for someone to be justly punished for their sins.

That is appropriate. But what does Deuteronomy 32 say? What is Romans 12, 19? Right before Paul said that passage in Romans 13, he quotes from Deuteronomy chapter 32 where God says, vengeance is mine.

[ 44 : 23 ] It is mine to repay, says the Lord. So it is right for someone to be justly punished for their sins, but vengeance is not ours, it is God's. He is the one who makes these decisions.

Okay, another lesson. Romans 12, Romans 12, 19. Oh, I agree.

I totally agree. Absolutely. I agree. I agree. But I'm focusing on the principle behind it that, and I'm also quoting from Deuteronomy 32 where there is this broader kind of application.

However, it's still squishy because this is said in Deuteronomy 32 in the context of God giving laws about how people are to carry out his vengeance on the criminals.

Okay, let's go on. remember that in the face of crime, the Lord is merciful. Micah 7, 18, the Lord delights in mercy.

[ 45 : 37 ] He delights in being merciful. This isn't something he says, well, I guess we have to go easy on him. He delights in being merciful. And then lastly, remember what our Lord said on the Sermon on the Mount.

He said, you know, remember you've heard, thou shalt not murder, but I say to you, anyone who hates his brother is guilty of murder. So in some sense, we are all guilty of the blood of our brethren in our hearts.

And these, I noticed that none of these lessons that I've articulated come down one way or the other necessarily, but they are things that we as Christians should all hold and consider as we are struggling with this issue of capital punishment.

Murder is worthy of death and execution, but so are all sins. It is right for someone to be justly punished for their sins, but ultimately vengeance is God's.

It is right for someone to be justly punished, but remember that the Lord is merciful. He also is merciful on victims as well, not just criminals. And remember that from the Lord's perspective, we are all guilty of murder if we've hated someone in our heart.

[ 47 : 06 ] That's the biblical standard. These are things we should always consider when we consider things like the death penalty. Okay, we have about five, six, seven minutes left for questions.

Matt. I would request that somebody read numbers 35, 33 through 34.

Numbers 35? 35, 33 through 34? 35, 33, okay.

Oh, sorry, I'm at numbers 33. This is where technology is not faster.

Okay, so you shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.

[ 48 : 12 ] You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell, for I, the Lord, dwell in the midst of the people of Israel. Okay. Yeah, do you have thoughts, Matt?

Could you just read the first verse again? Yeah, you shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood pollutes the land, and no atonement can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.

So, by the way, I don't think the Bible is totally clear about whether we should practice the death penalty in the United States today or not.

But it seems to me that that is the strongest passage in the Bible, supporting the idea that the death penalty is just. And I just suggest, in addition to the two possibilities you mentioned, that we shouldn't practice the death penalty, that the death penalty is permissible, a third position would be, you know, the death penalty is just.

And if we don't practice that, you know, we're falling short. Yes, yes. Thank you. This whole passage, actually, if you go even a few verses earlier, he says, if anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death.

[ 49 : 41 ] Period. So, yes, there are many people make that argument, Matt, in favor of capital punishment. Ivor.

When they have a lot of evidence for the guy who's caught in the act, I think, in my opinion, that's the only time they should ever do the death penalty.

That gets to the biblical idea. In fact, the verse I just read continues, I think, getting at what you're saying. It says, if anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness, which there's this very high evidentiary standard that was demanded.

And I'm not a lawyer, so some of you may be, but we have this beyond reasonable doubt standard in the United States when it comes to criminal cases.

But you could, in theory, imagine an even higher standard where you demand that even if certain evidence is removed, it still meets the bar of beyond reasonable doubt, which this sort of gets at.

[ 50 : 56 ] Even if you remove some of the witnesses, there'll still be another witness. Giovanni.

Yeah, so, for example, I think that the Bible does not also explicitly abolish, for example, slavery.

On the contrary, it has a lot of regulations on slavery in the Old Testament, and also in the New Testament because they did about it. But the Bible has the seed, which is the dignity of human life that leads to a eventual slavery.

So, I wonder if that would be a model to think about. Very good. Very good. It does have some kind of permission to it, and even some kind of regulation to it, but if we should strive for, as the gospel rolls into the world, societies that progressively abolish the capital fund.

I agree. Yes, Giovanni, that is a very good articulation. If we take the example of slavery, like you said, the Old Testament appears to permit it, but the seeds are laid for considering all humans equal in the eyes of God, and that seed blossomed into abolition.

You could make the same argument for the death penalty, that the death penalty was permitted, but the seeds are planted to abolish it. You could also make a contextual argument, if you wanted to, based on ancient societies and modern societies and things like that.

[ 52 : 32 ] So there's multiple ways you can get at that. I guess the question that remains is, at which point of history are we right now? Yes, I know, are we at the holy mountain stage where we're beating our swords into plowshares?

I know. Next week, we're talking about warfare, and we're going to see that the early church was extremely pacifistic, that Christians were not to conduct warfare.

But then, once there was a Christian emperor, they started thinking, well, wait a second here, we're going to rethink this. Their context changed, and they rethought things.

And that is different than what you're talking about, because it's worldly context instead of a, but context really does matter in some of these questions.

Okay, let me conclude in prayer, and then we got to get upstairs. Father in heaven, this is a hard question, Lord. We pray, Lord, that none of us would find ourselves in a situation where we have to make these kinds of choices, but we pray, Lord, that you would give us wisdom and discernment about capital punishment, that you would help us to be bearers of your spirit and your gospel to this world, both your justice and mercy.

[ 53 : 50 ] We pray, Lord, that in disputable matters we would honor our brothers and sisters who think differently, that we would love them and care for them and respect them. And, Lord, in view of your mercy, Lord, we pray for those who are on death row right now in this country.

We pray that they would come to know you, and we pray for those who they harmed, that you would bring mercy and peace, to their lives, and much assurance through your Holy Spirit.

And we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. All right, thanks, folks. Thanks, folks.